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# THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

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### POLITICAL THOUGHT IN RECONSTRUCTION

DILETTANTISM is as widespread to-day as it was when Carlyle wrote *Past and Present*, nor is it altogether self-evident why this term of disapprobation has been transferred from the world of politics to the realm of art. For it can hardly be denied that essentially the same failure to apply intelligence and imagination to social questions, the same ineffectiveness, and the same petty opportunism typify our legislative assemblies, as characterized the parliaments which called forth the scorn of the author of *Sartor Resartus*. Yet a change of decided significance has taken place. Social questions and political problems have begun to evoke the interest and to occupy the attention of thinkers capable of making at least some headway, and though the results of their labors are uncertain and have hardly affected the trend of practical affairs, nevertheless the ascendancy of political philosophy gives rise to the hope that parliaments may, ere long, cease to be mere talking establishments.

At any rate, an important change in philosophical tradition has undoubtedly taken place. It would be manifestly absurd to argue that at any time in the history of thought problems of social organization have been entirely neglected; yet it is equally obvious that while interest was focussed on Heaven or on the Thing-in-itself, man was naturally relegated to a position of secondary importance. For preoccupation with the other world and with the world of exaggerated dualism inevitably decreased the interest in exclusively human affairs. To be sure, St. Augustine's *City of God* had its mundane implications, and Hegel wrote a *Philosophy of Rights*, but though there is hardly a philosopher of note with whose name some political tract is not associated, thought was removed in more ways than one from the subject-matter of the *Republic*, the *Ethics* and the *Politics*.

Nevertheless there were more things in this world than Horatio dreamt of in his philosophy, and though no Plato or Aristotle appeared to formulate the conditions of social progress and to offer a programme for its furtherance, political life continued and under the influence of discovery, invention and industry, took on new forms

and guises. Perhaps it has never been adequately realized to how large an extent the errors of the industrial revolution are to be ascribed to accident, or rather to a single accident—the absence of intelligent comprehension, foresight and guidance. The dismal science was gloomy more because of the narrow vision of its exponents than because of the inherent darkness of the subject-matter of so-called political economy.

As an antidote to what he conceived to be the pessimism and pettiness of the school of Malthus and Ricardo, Carlyle advocated a return to the “eternal verities.” By fixing his gaze on these, man might assert his spiritual self and demonstrate his affinity to the transcendent super-sensible world. And in so doing the ills of this world would largely disappear.

There is perhaps little in this combination of German idealism and temperamental mysticism to remind us of Greek philosophy. Yet in Carlyle we have at least the recognition of two fundamental and axiomatic principles. He recognized in the first place that man was no mere passive subject of economic laws, but that he was an active agent capable of influencing and affecting the conditions and circumstances of his life. He did not fall into the fallacy of forgetting that economic man was primarily a man and only incidentally an economic man. In the second place he realized the importance of a plan of action, an imaginative programme by which activity could be guided. These two principles, it seems to me, so often neglected, are essential to any system of thought properly denominated political philosophy.

The supreme importance of these factors in our present situation is evident. We have perhaps been somewhat disingenuous in our protestations of complete disinterestedness in the war. To be sure we desire no colonies and have no *irridenta* to redeem; yet in a sense the world is our *irridenta*. We battle to secure it for our ideals. Are we prepared to mobilize the 1919 class of our ideals for prompt invasion? It were a sad commentary on our intelligence if they had in no way been affected by the experiences of the past four years. Though the condition may not be the most desirable it is manifest that a world in chaos is more plastic for our reforming desires than a world in the languid quiescence which we have been wont to call peace. Excessive optimism might suggest that in war we have found that coöperative organization to which we aspired, that in the struggle we have attained a moral equivalent for peace. Remaining more sober we may hope that we have made some progress even though we have achieved only the semblance of organization. To continue the development of these ideals and to endow them with new vigor

and purpose must be the primary function of political thought in reconstruction.

If reconstruction is to mean more than an attempt to return to ante-bellum habits, if political problems are to be of paramount significance in ethics, then surely it is of the utmost importance that political thinkers avoid the dangers which have in the past rendered their activities ineffective—the twin disabilities of insufficient practical intelligence and inadequate idealizing imagination. Imagination without intelligence usually results in beautiful Utopias to which we may flee from a less perfect world and for which we may well render grateful appreciation, but which do little to solve our problems since they fail to suggest means of accomplishment. Lack of imagination, on the other hand, has led thinkers into the pragmatic fallacy of forgetting that instruments must be subordinated to ends of some kind, that a programme must imply some result which it aims to achieve. *Realpolitik*, like realism in art, tends to suggest that only the base and the ugly are genuine, that ideals have no reality or importance.

A significant political philosophy will, then, seek to provide the essential features of an education which will foster and perfect it. It will attempt to provide a methodology and a technique suitable to the attainments of the ideals which it envisages, and in addition it will aim at that subtlest and most indefinable of all things essential to intelligent control in political affairs—an attitude of mind. Since this is to secure the greatest possible control by intelligence it may briefly be designated the scientific attitude, a willingness to judge each new experience and each newly presented fact with as slight a prejudice as possible. Or, to reverse the emphasis, it is an inclination to judge each experience in the light of the past, so that each added fact may be as significant as possible. This implies no lack of balance, no tendency to indulge in wild and fantastic flights with insufficient preparation. Our programme will depend to a large extent on individual temper, but complete openmindedness is not incompatible with caution; it is a mistake to assume that only radicals and revolutionaries can be “intellectuals.”

We are also in error when we attempt to identify intelligent action with action which can be formulated in terms of a syllogistic sequence. If we seek thus to limit the sphere of intelligence we will inevitably restrict the achievement. The function of reason is rather to coordinate all the elements of a complete life than to eliminate any. Through its agency we may hope to attain variety without dissipation. It is especially necessary to insist on this at the present moment of reconstruction when there is danger that in building our new house we may forget to include many of the

chambers in which we have been happiest and most justifiably content. Nor can we be satisfied to have these placed in an annex. If we seek to confine reconstruction to economic or even to obviously political affairs we can not really be successful. Every human impulse and endeavor must be given its place, for though peace be more generous than war in allowing casual activity, all industry must be made essential to a creative peace. And even those values which have to many seemed remote can no longer be isolated but must permeate all activity. If I have seemed to limit the importance of philosophy to purely ethical concerns, the significance of a world view to ethics here becomes manifest. If intelligence is to function most successfully it must be guided by an ample and attractive ideal.

But, it may be objected, is such an imaginative structure necessary or even desirable? Will not intelligence function effectively if left unhampered by a preconceived plan of action, so that it may judge according to definite circumstances and determine its course in every specific situation? Is there not a tendency for any programme to become antiquated, lack application to altered conditions and at the same time to grow rigid and thus obstruct possible progress? For whether a social theory arose as a protest against the existing order or as a supporter of it, we know that with the lapse of time when the conditions which gave it rise had ceased to pertain, it still tended to continue by force of sheer inertia.

Yet it does not seem to me that these objections touch the main point, and as a matter of fact they seem here to transcend their indisputably useful rôle of critic and to prevent desirable advance along new lines. Nor does this imply that their usefulness is a thing of the past; the suggestion is rather that they must remain critical but not obstructive. Otherwise there is an obvious danger that they will merely substitute new absolutes for old, though these be of somewhat negative character.

To propose that man cease to operate in terms of ends, that he rid himself of programmes because they may interfere with progress, is to suggest that he deprive his imagination of its essential creative quality. It can not be done. For imagination must provide the materials which intelligence is to weigh and test by energetic application to actual social problems in specific situations. The initial criterion of its success will surely be its power to rouse our enthusiasm, to stimulate us to ardent endeavor and fortify us for successful activity. For if a system of thought is to affect political destinies it can not do so "*ex machina*," but must first gain supporters.

But the pragmatic and instrumental values of a programme are by no means confined to this single virtue of rousing enthusiasm for purposeful activity. Granted that the ideal is more useful as an

instrument towards progress than it might be as an actual "end," its usefulness need not be restricted to its psychological effects. It will serve as a convenient measure by which advance may be determined and it will be a standard by which progress may be judged. But if this is one of its benefits it is likewise one of its dangers. For if we may estimate success by reference to a determined ideal, it will not really be a success unless in the process our ideal also has advanced. A plan can be of abiding value only if it is a growing plan.

To aim at an end is certainly necessary if we are to aim precisely and with adequate assurance, but if the end is a finish then it will have served only half its purpose. It is a process of reciprocal aid for which political thought must strive, in which imagination and intelligence fortify each other for their mutual advantage and hence for man's benefit.

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### AN OPPORTUNITY

*To the JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY:*

America is already playing a visible part in the destiny of Serbia. As a result of our common struggle, the Serbian race will be united in the free independent Jugoslavia, where all of us Serbs, the Croats and the Slovenes hope to find peace and an opportunity to pursue happiness and to contribute our modest share to the common civilization of mankind. But our needs—after the war—will be enormous, as our sacrifices during it have been of the heaviest. May I take advantage of your courtesy to draw the attention of your readers and contributors to a special need of the Jugoslavs which can be easily overlooked, but without the satisfaction of which much other assistance of a material order might prove futile.

Serbia and the Jugoslavs fight not only for their political and economic freedom. They are fighting not only for open ports, but also to come into free contact with the rest of the world, and so be able to exchange moral goods with the great and happier democracies of the West. Our first national need will be a new orientation and organization of our thinking. We have need of a national philosophy. We think that it can not be done successfully without the voluntary and sincere help of the American, British and French thinkers, scientists and philosophers. Therefore may I not appeal to such men in America to give a place in their thought to Serbia? They can help her very much in a practical way if they would write articles on the subjects they like most, but which can be immediately